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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: FEBRUARY 19, 2009

Summary: Prime Minister Gilani's statement hinting that the "government is considering sending FIA team to India for sharing information on the Mumbai attacks" dominated headlines in most major newspapers on Thursday. Newspapers also highlighted reports that a Pakistani "journalist was gunned down in Matta (Swat)," where he was covering the visit of TNSM chief Sufi Mohammad. Several major dailies highlighted reports that "President Obama has ordered an additional 17,000 U.S. soldiers to be sent to Afghanistan." President Zardari remarks advocating a "Marshall Plan" to fight militancy through socio-economic development received prominent coverage.

All newspapers continued to editorialize the most recent 'peace deal' in Swat, and its various implications. The centrist national daily, "The News," doubted that "Sufi Muhammad Khan, who has now said he wants Islamic law across the world rather than in Swat alone, seems uncertain he can pursue militants there to do his bidding. Worst still, nobody seems to quite know what the terms of the accord are." The pro-Taliban Jihadi daily, "Islam" observed that "it is surprising that the western powers are engaged in secret parleys with Taliban in Afghanistan through the Karzai administration, and the good office of Saudi Arabia, but when the same thing is happening in Pakistan, they raise hue and cry over it." Commenting on the "contradictory charisma," of Sufi Mohammad, the Lahore-based liberal daily, "Daily Times," wrote: "He was able to get thousands of innocent Pashtuns to walk with him into Afghanistan to fight the Americans without any one of them knowing how to handle modern weapons testifies to his capacity to mislead." End Summary.

News Stories

"Dispatch Of FIA Team To India On The Card" "Dawn" (02/19)

"Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani has said that Pakistan is contemplating sending a team of investigators to India in connection with investigations into the Mumbai attacks."

"War Was Never An Option: Mukherjee" "Dawn" (02/19)

"Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee dramatically scaled down his hawkish stance with Pakistan on Wednesday and told Parliament that New Delhi had never considered war as an option to vent its anger at Islamabad over the Mumbai massacres of November last year."

"Journalist Gunned Down In Swat" "Dawn" (02/19)

"A journalist, Musa Khankhel, was killed in Matta Tehsil of Swat on Wednesday. The correspondent for 'The News' and 'Geo TV' was kidnapped in Matta, where he was covering the visit of Tehrik Nifaz-i-Shariat Muhammadi Chief Maulana Sufi Mohammad, and his bullet-riddled body was found near Dedpani."

"U.S. In Wait-And-See Mode Over Swat Deal" "Dawn" (02/19)

"The United States said on Wednesday it would wait for the results before offering any comments on a peace deal between the Swat militants and Pakistani authorities. The cautious U.S. reaction - given at a regular briefing at the State Department - contrasts sharply with that of America's NATO allies described the truce as 'certainly a reason for concern.'"

"U.S. Seeks Explanation From Pakistan On Swat Deal" "The News" (2/19)

"As international concern has grown over Pakistan signing a peace deal with a Taliban-linked group for enforcing Shariah law in the restive NWFP, including Swat Valley, the U.S. has said it will seek a 'fuller explanation' from Islamabad on the issue, State Department spokesperson Gordon Duguid told reporters on Wednesday."

"U.S. Privately Backs Shariah-For-Peace Deal" "Daily Times" (02/19)

"The deal, under which Shariah courts will be introduced in the Malakand and Kohistan districts if Taliban end their armed campaign in the Swat valley, enjoys private backing from the Americans, Daily Telegraph reported on Wednesday. U.S. officials in Islamabad privately backed the deal as an attempt to drive a wedge between Swat's Taliban, which is focused on its demand for Shariah law, and the Al Qaeda-linked Taliban led by Baitullah Mehsud. 'The strategy has to be to divide the two groups. The TNSM and Baitullah's TTP found some common cause briefly, but a peace deal will separate them,' said one U.S. official."

"Allies Alarmed By Pakistan's Deal With Taliban" "Daily Times" (02/19)

"Pakistan's startling accord with the Taliban that would impose Islamic law in Swat, looms as a setback for the United States which hopes to mount a united front against the Taliban there and in Afghanistan. The agreement between the government and the Taliban cemented a truce between the two sides and gave the insurgents dominance in the Swat region by installing a strict regimen of Shariah amenable to the Taliban. 'It is definitely a step backwards,' said James Dobbins, the Bush administration's first envoy for Afghanistan."

"Sufi Leads Peace March" "The News" (02/19)

"Maulana Sufi Mohammad, Chief of the Tanzim Nifaz Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM), Wednesday reached Matta, the stronghold of militants in the volatile Swat Valley, as part of his peace mission. However, he could not hold talks with his son-in-law as widely expected by euphoric people who largely participated in his rally to play their part in the peaceful solution to the Swat problem."

"Obama Sends 17,000 Fresh Troops To Afghanistan: Pak-Afghan Border Situation Needs Urgent Attention: U.S." "Daily Times" (02/19)

"U.S. President Barack Obama has ordered an additional 17,000 U.S. soldiers to be sent to Afghanistan, saying 'the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan demands urgent attention and swift action.'"

"Afghanistan Can Become Obama's Vietnam: Clinton" "Pakistan Observer" (02/19)

"If the U.S. President attempts to do what the British and the Russians did in the past, then Afghanistan could become 'Barack Obama's Vietnam,' but it is unlikely to happen, former President Bill Clinton has said."

"Zardari Seeks Marshal Plan For Pakistan" "The News" (02/19)

"President Asif Ali Zardari said on Wednesday the international community needed to devise a Marshal Plan to enhance Pakistan's ability to fight the militants through a massive program of socio-economic development, education and employment in the under-developed tribal areas in particular and in the country in general."

"Karzai Due Today In Islamabad" "Dawn" (02/19)

"Afghan President Hamid Karzai is arriving in Islamabad today (Thursday) with 'new ideas' for Afghanistan and Pakistan to take unified stance at the upcoming review of the U.S. policy for the region where both of them have been invited, Foreign Office said in a brief statement on Wednesday."

"Interpol Praises Pakistan For Setting Up NACTA" "The News" (02/19)

"Interpol Chief Khoo Boon Hui has praised Pakistan for setting up the National Counter-Terrorism Authority (NACTA), hoping that it would promote greater coordination between intelligence agencies in fighting extremism and terrorism, 'The News' learned in Islamabad on Wednesday."

"Two Girls' Schools Blown Up In Bajaur; 8 Militants Dead" "Dawn" (02/19)

"Militants blew up two girls' schools in the Bajaur tribal region on Wednesday and security forces claimed killing eight Taliban insurgents and injuring five other in a fierce gun battle."

"Press Club In Wana Blown Up" "Dawn" (02/19)

"The building of Wana Press Club was blown up on Wednesday. An official of the political administration said, the blast caused no casualty."

"Sunni Leader Gunned Down In Quetta" "Daily Times" (02/19)

"Unidentified men killed Jamaat Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat-Noorani provincial leader Maulana Iftikhar Ahmed Habibi in Quetta on Wednesday."

"Musharraf Consented To Drone Strikes: Book" "The News" (02/19)

"The new book by American journalist David E. Sanger, which forced (R) Gen. Pervez Musharraf to break his media silence and come before the cameras in denial, also makes the shocking revelation that there was a secret understanding between the U.S. and Gen. (R) Pervez Musharraf on two small forward operating bases of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) deep inside Pakistan's military facilities."

"Drones Operating From Shamsi Airbase: Report" "The News" (02/19)

"The Central Intelligence Agency (CA) has secretly been using an airbase in southwester Pakistan to launch the Predator drones to attack the militants within the country, according to 'The Times.'"

"Taliban Network Developing In Karachi" "Daily Times" (02/19)

"The banned organisation Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has established a strong network in Karachi, in association with local Jihadi outfits and other groups, it has been learned. This network is involved in major illegal activities and sending funds worth millions of rupees to the militants in Tribal Areas."

Editorials/Op-eds

"Back To School?," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/19)

"Sufi Muhammad Khan, who has now said he wants Islamic law across the world rather than in Swat alone, seems uncertain he can persuade

militants there to do his bidding. Worse still, nobody seems to quite know what the terms of the accord are. The central government's attitude is, at best, ambiguous -- not saying quite what it seeks to achieve. These realities mean that, sadly, Swat's girls are unlikely to remain safely in school.... The whimsical approach to the peace deal shows there is still a lack of earnest desire to ensure they and others who live in the area are protected."

"Hue And Cry Of Big Powers On Swat Peace Deal," an editorial in the Karachi-based, pro Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam" (cir. 15,000) (02/19)

"The big powers' criticism on the implementation of Shariat laws shows that they don't want peace and stability in this area, and they aren't concerned about the troubles of the people. They just want to see bloodshed, unrest and fighting, and they don't care that this destructive uprising can undermine Pakistan's internal security. It is quite surprising that the western powers, which are engaged in secret parleys with Taliban in Afghanistan through the Karzai administration and the good offices of Saudi Arabia, raise hue and cry when the same thing is happening in Pakistan."

"Sufi Muhammad's Contradictory Charisma," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (02/19)

"Sufi Muhammad is a man of extraordinary charisma. It hardly matters if he is bristling with contradictions and changes his worldview frequently to suit his situation. That he was able to get thousands of innocent Pashtuns to walk with him into Afghanistan to fight the Americans without any one of them knowing how to handle modern weapons testifies to his capacity to mislead."

"U.S. Unrest Over Malakand Peace Deal," an editorial in the popular rightist Urdu-language daily "Ausaf" (cir. 10,000) (02/19)

"The historic welcome of Sufi Mohaqd by the people of Swat valley, and their jubilation on the recent peace deal are pretty visible on the TV screens, and certainly the people and the government of the United States must have also seen these scenes, but it is regrettable that the U.S. government termed the peace deal as a negative move, and urged the government of Pakistan to focus on the military operation. In other words, the U.S. government wants that the Pakistan Army continued to kill its own people, and carried on this course till the killing of the last militant. The government of Pakistan must ensure that the United States should not attempt to sabotage this peace deal."

"Concern By The U.S. And Allies At The Swat Deal," an editorial in the Lahore-based Urdu daily "Waqt" (circ. 5000) (02/19)

"The Malakand agreement is being praised at the national and international level. Criticism by the U.S. and its allies cannot be termed appropriate at all. They must also bear in mind that there is no reason to criticize a demand by the populace that is in conformity with the Constitution, and whose implementation will lead to peace."

"U.S. Reaction To The Nifaz-i-Shariat Agreement," an editorial in the Lahore-based populist center-right Urdu daily "Khabrain" (cir. 50,000) (02/19)

"As feared, the U.S. has not liked the peace agreement. According to it [the U.S.] military operation is the solution to the issue. What has the U.S. gained from its seven-year old military operation in Afghanistan? A recession that is giving sleepless nights to popular President Obama? The deal has sent a wave of happiness in the populace. As the U.S. and NATO do not like this situation - demonstrated by their statements -- there is a threat that an attempt will be made to spoil the atmosphere. This could be done in two ways: either by sabotaging the process through their agents or by intensifying the drone attacks.... The U.S. should not turn this into an issue of pride, but should instead welcome the peace deal."

"The Signature Of The PQident," an editorial in the Islamabad-based rightist English daily "Pakistan Observer" (cir.

5,000) (02/19)

"It is unfortunate that some so-called liberal elements have started opposing and criticizing the enforcement of Shariah Regulation in Malakand Agency.... However the criticism of the liberals on the enforcement of Shariah on the demand of the local people is beyond one's comprehension. Nizam-e-Adl will be applicable in eight districts of the NWFP and if that satisfies the people and help restore peace and order what is wrong with that."

"Swat Accord: Why To Worry?," an editorial in the Karachi-based right-wing pro-Jamaat-e-Islami Urdu daily "Jasarat" (cir. 3,000) (02/19)

"Whether the peace deal in Swat valley will be a success, or a failure, is yet to be seen. Meanwhile people should welcome this initiative, and wait for the outcome. Things are not very clear yet, but there is an uproar to oppose to this peace deal. The implementation of laws, and the restoration of peace in any part of the country are internal matters of Pakistan and as such the international community should refrain from commenting on such issues."

"Swat Deal - What Next?," an op-ed by Nazia Hussain in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/19)

"Imposition of Shariah in one part of the state and the government's agreeing to the demands of the Taliban should not be seen only in the context of its bowing down to militants.... Let us, for a while, not perceive it as a chess move by the government in the war against terror, or the bargaining chip of a radical Islamic group. Let us not predict whether the truce will hold or give way to further violence."

"Will Obama's Strategy Succeed In Afghanistan?," an op-ed by Ghulam Asghar Khan in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (02/19)

"There is no military solution in Afghanistan and its adjacent tribal belt of Pakistan. As the old saying goes: 'It is easy to reach and conquer Kabul, but there has never been a safe way back.' This has been the Afghan history since the times of Alexander the Great. The Soviets learned it the hard way and the UQ and its NATO allies are facing similar mire in Afghanistan."

"Access To U.S. Market For Pakistani Products," an editorial in the leading mass circulation centrist Urdu daily "Jang" (cir. 300,000) (02/19)

"U.S. Principal Officer Brian D. Hunt has said that the U.S. would provide market access to the Pakistani products.... The business circles have urged the friendly countries to provide concessions to Pakistani businessmen and give access to their products, so that Pakistan may come out of the present economic crisis. Moreover taxes and duties on Pakistani goods should also be decreased to reduce the production cost. The loans from IMF on high interest rates will create difficulties for Pakistan in the future. The government must remember that only a policy of self-reliance can bailout Pakistan from the prevailing economic crisis."
Patterson